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## The Theme of Globalization in Kincaid's *Among Flowers*

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The “Political Sublime” is a framework in which the psychic merges with the material. It deconstructs what Teresa Brennan calls the “psychical fantasy of woman” in which man moves on, passing inertia to women and making her an object of “gaze;” the primary source is Brennan’s theory of “transmission of affect” (*History after Lacan* 110) It then takes into consideration the theories of Indian philosophers Amartya Sen and Sri Aurobindo, which bring the psychic and the material together; Aurobindo represents the spiritual aspects while Sen represents the material aspects of Indian philosophy. But I reread this, arguing that the political sublime will not occur if the divide between matter and spiritual is not resolved. This intersects with Immanuel Kant’s theory of the sublime in terms of transcendence. Kant did not relate transcendence with the material world or a politics that one can practice in everyday life. I envision the “political sublime” as offering a strategy for dealing with life in a subliminal way that is grounded in reality as well.

### **Amartya Sen’s Concept of Pluralistic Identity**

Consider Amartya Sen’s following observation and my critique that it needs a touch of ego-transcendence. The nuance is there in the theory:

To deny plurality, choice and reasoning in identity can be source of repression, new and old, as well as a source of violence and brutality. The need for delineation, important as it is, is perfectly compatible with the recognition of plurality, of conflicting loyalties, of demands of justice and mercy, as well as of affection and solidarity. Choice is possible and important in individual contact and social decisions, even if we remain oblivious of it. (*Reason before Identity* 22)

Sen’s theory clarifies the concept of the “political sublime,” that is, practicing ethics and conscientious behavior in every sphere of life. What Sen proclaims is very true and applies to any theory of identity. The entire world is in utter chaos because of the lack of tolerance for each nation and each culture. Since 9/11, the problem was aggravated when religion entered the world scene in a more aggressive way. The West was already suffering from its problem of racism; then religion became an issue that had to be taken more seriously.

Kincaid’s *Among Flowers* takes place in Nepal, and links Nepal with Vermont to create a global narrative, in which the author lives a pluralistic identity. Her identity is both stable and dispersed. Her identity is stable in the sense that she adores nature and divine energy. Her identity is dispersed because she enjoys spiritually roaming from Vermont to Nepal and Nepal to Vermont and keenly desires to bring them together. The book *Among Flowers* is full of promise. If one looks back at *The Autobiography of My Mother*, one cannot recognize the Kincaid of *Among Flowers*. A different kind of pain of oppression is redeemed here; it is a quick move from pain to resolution and redemption. In the entire work we hear that nature can be a great healer.

Kincaid philosophizes periodically in her earlier works, but here she is more distinctly philosophical. But how does one make that kind of move? How did Kincaid's poetics change and what is the reason behind it? Does Kincaid choose to write this travel memoir as an escape from her engagement with political issues related to colonialism, or is it a substantive shift in poetics? This article deliberates these questions of Kincaid's preoccupation with the sublime, in the context of my own preoccupation with the political sublime.

The sublime takes place through immersion into philosophy—which I interpret through Indian philosophy or Eastern mysticism. One encounters a lot of mysticism in this travelogue. The act of travel itself is philosophically imbued with the concept of globalization. The writer travels to another part of the world and explores various other meanings of life through her passion for gardening and through her linking of the Vermont garden with the forest in the Himalayas. Things are being accomplished on multiple planes. First of all, being in the Himalayas and in touch with nature, she is transported to a different world. But the sublime one encounters in her work does not consist of just mere romanticism, but transcendentalism of a nature, which Teresa Brennan addressed in her concept of “original logic” (*History* 109) and “energetic connections” (*History* 113), and the eco-feminist Vandana Shiva addressed most recently in her works. Primarily, it is a call to get back to one's self—the self, which is not biased and trapped by ego. Thus, in terms of ego-transcendence, Kincaid's work embodies the Relational Cultural Theory advanced by the Stone Center for Women, which also proposes a model of ego-transcendence.

### **Connection with Relational Cultural Theory**

On her journey through the Himalayas, Jamaica Kincaid makes connections with different people in different parts of the world, and by establishing these connections recalls the thoughts of the Relational Cultural Theorists (RCT). In a manner that echos the Romantic poet William Wordsworth, she describes one such experience in the section “A Night Spent in the Gorge:”

A wide vista of green forested mountains reaching up to touch that everlasting blue cloudless sky and the mountains themselves reaching down into a valley, the bottom of which we could not see. The day before, at lunchtime, I had seen a boy who was not of our party, passing us by shepherding some cows, heading in the same direction we were. Now I saw him again but he was going toward the place I had seen him the day before, the place we had lunch, the place I might never see again. And it was brought home to me again, that while every moment I was experiencing had an exquisite uniqueness and made me feel that everything was unforgettable, I was also in the middle of someone else's daily routine, someone captured by the ordinariness of his everyday life. (166)

Here Kincaid relates simultaneously with nature and human beings. The kind of affection and attachment she reveals to previously unknown people can be achieved if one possesses what the Relational Cultural Theorists call “mutual empathy,” which can be experienced naturally and spontaneously. For example, in “Some Misconceptions and Reconceptions of a Relational Approach,” Dr. Miller and other RCT theorists articulate the theoretical concepts of RCT:

That is human beings can develop only within relationships with other people, more specifically, other people who can engage in relationships in a way which fosters the development of the people in them. However, once we have a societal system in which one group has made itself a dominant group, that group obviously cannot create a system of relationships based on fostering the full development of all people. By definition, a dominant group cannot build a system based on empathy for, and empowerment of, others. But all societies must provide such relationships to some extent, otherwise no one could develop at all. (27)

This model of ego-transcendence is very similar to Teresa Brennan's theory of the “transmission of affect.” However, Kincaid's approach, although similar is unique as well, because nature has a great impact on her writing. The way Kincaid notices how she became merged with the daily routine and ordinariness of someone else's life is significant. This also has a touch of universalism and a note of humanitarian identity. In the same section, Kincaid comments, “We stopped and ate lunch in a hamlet just before Donje, the place we would camp for that night. It was so pleasant, so magical really .... The extended family living there was very friendly and did not show us any sign that they found our sudden presence among them mystifying” (167). In Kincaid's world, nature and human beings constantly merge together. Kincaid, like Brennan and other eco-feminists like Shiva, embraces nature, but embraces human beings as well, as is revealed in her comment on how the extended family in the site of the camp extended a warm welcome to them. Thus, she connects with the Relational Cultural Theorists through empathy but differs through her love for nature.

### **The Concept of Familiarity**

The concept of familiarity is revealed in a poignant manner in Kincaid's *Among Flowers*. This notion of familiarity is rooted in both Indian philosophy and the modern/postmodern concept of globalization.<sup>1</sup> Thus, Kincaid's most recent work reflects a positive aspect of globalization, where the home meets the world or the world becomes one's home. It also connects with Rushdie's *Shalimar the Clown*, but with the difference that Rushdie's novel, although it takes place between two worlds, India and America, does not end with the positive aspect of globalization but with agony and frustration. As opposed to that, in Kincaid's travelogue the author is content and brings back home her fond memories of a garden and a strong connection with another part of the world. It is interesting to see the way that Kincaid

reveals her journey in the Himalayas through her flashback to the memory of traveling in southwestern China, and her sense of cosmic self or merging of her self with transcendence. She reports in her lucid poetic language that often she could not remember who she was or what she was about in her life. There is also a sense of quest for something that cannot be possessed, but which we all desire. Thus, speaking of her experience in the Himalayas, we repeatedly encounter her notion of losing herself and possibly her sense of merging with the greater self, for example:

This account of a walk I took while gathering seeds of flowering plants in the foothills of the Himalayas can have its origin in my love of the garden, my childhood love of botany and geography, my love of feeling isolated, of imagining myself all alone in the world and everything unfamiliar, or the familiar being strange, my love of being afraid but at the same time not letting my fear stand in the way, my love of things that are far away, but things I have no desire to possess. (7)

This succinctly expresses the very essence of ego-transcendence, which is the basic message revealed in the *Upanishads* and the *Gita*. Literally speaking, her expressions are ecstatic. She imagines herself alone in the world and at the same time derives a pleasure mixed with fear. But her joy has a sense of awe in it — it can also be defined as wonder; Kincaid derives wonder and joy from nature, because nature is unselfish and does not desire anything in return. The French feminist Luce Irigaray is an interesting point of reference here; Irigaray defines her theory of wonder that is based on Descartes' theory of wonder (Whitford *Irigaray Reader* 171) and, as a matter of fact, rereads that theory. While Descartes alludes to the sense of wonder that one derives from artwork, Irigaray transfers this to the man-woman relationship. It seems that Kincaid derives that sense of wonder from nature and in this sense she is close to Irigaray's theory, as well as to Teresa Brennan's theory of original logic. And, if I may say so, she is close to the Indian eco-feminist Vandana Shiva, who emphasizes the importance of nature and natural things. But at another plane, it is also connected to classical Indian philosophy. Her expression, "... my love of things that are far away, but things I have no desire to possess," reverberates with the note of detachment expressed in the *Upanishadas* and the *Gita*. The closest expression I find at this moment is from the Bengali Nobel Laureate Rabindranath Tagore's song, "*Ami chanchal he, ami sudurer piyasi; ... ogo sudur bipula sudur, tumi je bajao bapul bansari; mor dana nai, ache ak thani, sekatha je ji pasari*" ("I am restless and I am the dreamer of the far away places; ... O dear far away lands, you are playing such a fine and intense tune of song, I do not have wings, and I am limited to one place on earth, and it's a pity that I forget that"). Kincaid expresses her passion for faraway lands, but in her imagination she is liberating herself and, unlike the Indian poet, is not thinking of being a bird. This love for travel has an analogy in Indian Upanishadic text. It says *Charai bati*, meaning go forward, or one can also think of the other expression, *Basudhaeva kutumbkama*, meaning the entire world is my home.

Let me underscore this point with another allusion to Tagore's lines: "*kato ajanare janaile tumi, kato ghare dile thani; durke karile nikot bandhu, parke karile bhail/ purano abas*

*chere jai jabe, mane bhebe mari kijani ki habe; nutaner majhe tumi puritan, sekatha je bhule jai.*" It means that God has made the universe known to us and made the entire world home to us. We pine for our old home but we forget that God is present everywhere and because of divine presence the new home becomes our old home. This has the ring of globalization. It also addresses the role of the supreme in one's life. The poet describes that the supreme has opened up an entire treasure trove to him by making the far near, and making friendship with distance, and making strangers brothers. So, when one leaves a familiar place or old abode, one worries, but one has the solace that the supreme is present in the new encounters one makes, and since the supreme's benign presence protects that traveler, he or she is safe and sound. The sense of happiness, security, and contentment rises from one's encounter with the supreme.

The supreme according to Indian philosophy represents the concept of the absolute. This absolute could be inscribed as Brahman, which signifies the concept of the divine, and one achieves Brahman or the Supreme through transcending one's ego's boundary. So, the poet is telling us that once the boundary of the ego is conquered, one can easily embrace strangers as friends, and distances become small. In the following observation from *Among Flowers*, there is the echo of this kind of Indian spirituality, which I will inscribe as the political sublime: "This turned out to be true, for when I saw all that I had been familiar with again, everything was changed in my eyes, and yet it did remain the way it had always been, only that I did not see anything the same way again" (7). Kincaid's vision is transformed because her travel to another part of the world has changed her perception. It is similar to what the Indian poet says, that distance becomes close, and strangers become brothers. She does not mention any spirituality, but I read it as strongly present in her philosophical observations. Her comment on the note of familiarity, that everyone seems familiar to her, is portrayed as a Joycean moment of epiphany.

### **More on Her Love for Nature**

Kincaid's quest for nature and the supreme form of contentment that she derived from nature on her trip to the Himalayas is strongly revealed in the section "Topke Gola." She is simply charmed by the mountains, but there is more to it than that. In this section, she describes her experience of exposure to the Himalayan landscape as follows: "As it is, I just went to Nepal on a plant-hunting, seed-collecting trek and the landscape at the foothills of the Himalayan mountains have left my tongue somewhat stilled, perhaps permanently so" (136). She recognizes that she went for a simple search (plant hunting) that resulted in her experience of bliss. I want to refer to two other scenes in the section where nature and human beings offer infinite sources of joy to Kincaid. The supreme attachment that she develops to nature on this trip is revealed in the following statement: "... for each word I put in the book is a word I have had to part with, each experience I portray in this book is one I had to part with. I have not wanted to part with anything, word, or experience, I have had while walking around the foothills of the Himalayas in Nepal among its flowers" (139). Its trigger was the pass or the hidden lake, which she described

as, "... seen by so very few human eyes for all its millions of years' existence, its contents eventually joining up with the great Ganges" (138-39). Kincaid is enamored of the fact that the hidden lake joins the Ganges River, the sacred river of the Hindus. Her appreciation of a foreign culture and religion is admirable and points toward her globalized and universal identity. She also admires the Sacred Lake in Topke Gola, which a goddess is said to inhabit, but her joy is not as great as it was when she saw the natural lake. She explains it herself, "But the Sacred Lake plunged me into thinking of the unknowableness of the other people" (151). Thus, it does not surpass her joy of seeing the natural lake: "a body of water situated in an area of the world with which I am not at all geographically familiar fills me with the joy of spectacle, the happiness that comes from the privilege of looking at something solely rare and solely uncomplicated" (150-51). Seemingly, Kincaid plunges into a Kantian meditation on aesthetics, stunned by nature's ravishing beauty. However, there is a subtle difference here between a Kantian notion of nature's beauty and Kincaid's own perception. Whereas Kant thinks that there is a divide between sensory perception of beauty from nature and the sublime, Kincaid derives a sense of sublimity from the sensory perception of the Sacred Lake at Topke Gola.<sup>2</sup>

### **Transmission of Affect**

But Kincaid completely departs from her preoccupation with colonial segregation and almost takes a quantum leap in *Among Flowers*, discussing instead peace, solution, and the sublime. On this journey she comes very close to Brennan's concept/theory of affect, or transmission of affect, and discernment. Brennan's book *The Transmission of Affect*, published posthumously, is revolutionary in this regard. What is unique about her theory is that she extends it to day-to-day life. She critiques Western culture by pointing out its limitation of practicing transmission of affect only in clinics or in literature.<sup>3</sup> Her argument is that it was always there in antiquity, but not inculcated in modern times. She argues in *The Transmission of Affect*:

To date, the only documented instances of modern discernment of the transmission of affect lie in literature and clinics. Despite this, I want to suggest that a faculty of discernment operates at various levels, and we can identify these readily if we admit that the practice of discernment long predates its application to matters of transmission ... Indeed awareness of the struggle with affects or passions runs as long as the meditative tradition in which the faculty for concentration in the form of prayer has been pitched in battle against the sources of distractions. The Jesuit-trained Descartes and the Jewish-educated Spinoza were aware of meditative battle. (117)

The transmission of affect is rooted in psychoanalysis, philosophy, and yoga. To imply that it is rooted in yoga only would be to simplify it too much. When I was writing my previous book *Jouissance as Ananda*, I was constantly queried about the theory of "jouissance" as "ananda" via

ego-transcendence that is solely based on yoga. I was uncomfortable with this question because my analysis was grounded in the intellectual theories of French feminism and Indian philosophy. Brennan also claims that her theory of transmission of affect is based on intellectual theory; it is not simply yoga. However, she stretches it beyond her theory of original logic or the theory of energy. She defines this new theory as “discernment” (*History* 116) and also as surplus of living attention. It is a form of ego-transcendence. It is a way of transforming negative affects and bad energy to positive affects. Brennan also argues that usually passion is relegated to the unconscious. Because Western society is so deeply permeated with ego, it is hard to accomplish this in real life. But it is possible.

Brennan's theory of transmission of affect is not a simplistic, voyeuristic journey to the unknown. It is very material and tangible. It is material and tangible in the way Brennan builds the theory of discernment on her theory of original logic, in which one strives to connect to another in the way one is connected in the intra-uterine nest. In utero, the child is not affected by any negative affects, the way it is after birth. Brennan comments, “Loving attention does not provide the absolute shield that partaking in the living logic does, but it is its best approximation” (135). Brennan came up with her theory of original logic and energetic connection to put a stop to the ego's era, to the psychical fantasy of woman explained by Lacan, and also to undo the master-slave dialectic. Her argument is that the foundational fantasy, the hallucinations created by the infant to compensate for its post-uterine needs, is the root cause of all evil and “isms” on the earth, and it is formulated right after birth. In the formation of foundational fantasy, the gender distinction is formulated — because motion gets associated with the male and inertia with the female sex and this hierarchy further leads to racial discrimination and all other kinds of discriminations. So, Brennan's argument is that in order to dismantle the ego's era, the foundational fantasy that the entire world and the mother is its slave, and that the child is in control, needs to be annihilated. Her solution is to seek it in the intra-uterine nest. Consider her comment in *The Transmission of Affect*:

I hypothesized earlier that light might be cast on some of the unknowns in embryology if the living logic of mother's flesh constituted a shield against the negative affects, in the same way that her energetic attention constitutes a shield after birth. But the nature of this postnatal shield is different. Loving attention does not provide the absolute shield that partaking in the living logic does, but it is its best approximation. (135)

Therefore, one can conclude that “loving attention” is another expression for “discernment.” Thus, Brennan replaces the “living logic” with “loving attention.” Loving attention is identical to mother's grace. Thus, if one looks at the world from the perspective of loving attention, a lot of problems of the world could be resolved, with peace and harmony filtering out negative affects.



Kincaid uses this kind of “loving attention” in her travelogue as she encounters people in Nepal. Kincaid describes it as a magical or an epiphanic experience, but it shows her compassion for unknown people. She observes:

People seemed as if they had no purpose to being themselves, as if the only reason to be there was just to be there. The tiny street came to an end abruptly, going immediately from the confusion of authentic and imposter to the solidly real, and the real was poor and deprived and self-contained .... People were bathing, washing their clothes, or filling up utensils with water. Because of my own particular history, every person I saw in this situation seemed familiar to me. But then again, because of my own particular history, every person I saw in the Thamel was familiar also. The person in the restaurant complaining about the lack of luxury was familiar, the person at the public baths longing for luxuries of every kind was familiar, the person confused and in a quandary was familiar. (18)

It is possible to look at the world in this way if one has this kind of attitude initiated by discernment or loving attention. My interpretation of it is also *Brahman darsan* or seeing *Brahman* everywhere. One attains that if one can conquer one's ego and achieve that heightened level of consciousness called *Brahman*. What Brennan renders as discernment through ego-transcendence, I render as *Brahman Darsan* or “*ananda*.” In *Jouissance as Ananda*, I connect Brennan's theory with Indian philosophy and here I extend that connection to an interpretation of Kincaid's novel, and also usher in my theory of the political sublime, which is one step toward the theory of “*ananda*.” I reiterate the connection between Brennan and Indian Philosophy here by quoting from *Jouissance and Ananda*: “This quest for the greater life that is implicit in Brennan's argument on the original logic could be expressed according to Indian Hindu culture as the quest for the Brahman” (98). Consider also the following statement on Brahman:

In the *Isha Upanishad* it has been observed, “*Isha baysyamidam sarbam jat kincha jagatyam jagat/ten taktenn bhunjitha ma gridha kasyashid dhanam*” (7). It means that the entire universe is the manifestation of Brahman and nothing can exist without his existence and thus one has to aspire to know this Brahman and when one learns about him one sheds the materialistic desires and develops a kind of detachment to materialistic things. (*Jouissance* 98)

There is one more step to realization. Attaining the consciousness of *Brahman* is not the end; but when one achieves the realization of Brahman, the entire world becomes one's home. Kincaid almost has a similar realization as her surroundings in Nepal acquire that kind of intimacy for her.<sup>4</sup> She tries to get rid of the real as she suggests that the real was and one needs magic in life.

*Among Flowers* truly reflects the genuine note of globalization. She inhabits a global space indeed; in her world in the Himalayas each and every person seems to be very close to her. She does not differentiate between them and herself in terms of nationalities or geographical

boundaries. She seems close to Sherpas, Maoists, and the pedestrians she meets; she is also very intimate with nature. It seems she has completely departed from her previous works in which she engages with racial identity, and the calamity caused by one's race and gender. Here, Kincaid resonates with a note of healing and positive identity consciousness. This also strongly corroborates the concepts of humanitarian identity and the political sublime. The notion of humanitarian identity does not abide by any law of geographical or national boundary; likewise, the political sublime upholds a vision in which one practices ethical consciousness achieved through sublimation of one's ego and does so in daily life. It is not a sublime that is away from society, or the universe, or the community, but one that resides close to one's heart and home and gives a direction to humanity in the positive way that ends hatred and war and establishes peace on earth.

### **Eco-feminism in *Among Flowers***

The names *Chyamatang*, a village that Kincaid passed through at 7,260 feet altitude, and *Mani Bhanjyang*, another village where she spent the night, with their lilting melodies call us to a different world; in the words of the Indian poet Rabindranath Tagore, they travel to the world of far lands where one cannot go without wings, and one forgets the truth of winglessness and one pines (*Gitanjali*). Kincaid's *Among Flowers* expresses a similar kind of pining and thirst for a faraway land, which will nourish all her desires. One of her other desires is to come to terms with flowers/nature. She has garden in Vermont where she lives, but she thinks that her experience will be incomplete if she does not acquaint herself with a different floral experience, or a different kind of encounter with nature. It is as if by doing this she wants to make a home in the world. But this home is different; it indicates an all-embracing love that is generated through one's close relationship with nature. The author seems to be the heroine here and all her experiences with plants and flowers point in one direction only — to make a home in the world and thereby to make herself at home and to immerse herself in a cosmic identity. Consider one of her intimate experiences with nature in which she recognizes flowers from her native Vermont while taking a walk in the Himalayas in Nepal. Seeing the same flower leads her to an ecstatic moment— seemingly connecting both the worlds for her. She portrays her experience in a lively manner:

For Dan and Bleddyn had raced ahead as would always be the case, and suddenly I saw these pink flowers everywhere—at my feet when I looked down and somewhere above eye level when I looked up, and then alongside me when I was just going forward. I recognized them from shape and texture, only I had seen them in another color, deep purple. I had seen those same flowers in a nursery in Vermont and in a garden in Maine but only in deep purple. To see them now in pink while remembering them in purple enhanced my feeling of anxiety and

alienation, and so when I said to Sue, “What is this?” and she answered me matter-of-factly, “That’s *Osbeckia*,” I was comforted. (41)

### **How is Globalization Happening?**

In certain sections of the travelogue Kincaid is preoccupied with the theme of anxiety and globalization. She mentions quite a bit about Maoists and the tension generated by them. This is not the anxiety expressed in *The Autobiography of My Mother*, where through the mother-daughter relationship she expresses the lacunae of Caribbean culture which might reflect the impact of Westernization, where the daughter is not acknowledged by the mother’s friends, relatives, or even the father. Here, Kincaid’s anxiety is expressed, not so much in psychoanalytic terms, but more directly. She is anxious about “killing.” She is anxious because she has to fake a Canadian identity, since as an American citizen she might be in danger because Secretary of State Colin Powell disavowed the movement led by the Maoists. What is unique is her power of universality, which does not limit her to one racial/ethnic group. She does not mind being called Canadian, although she is American. As she explains:

Around that time, Sue and Blyddyn became Welsh and Dan and I became Canadian. Until then, I would never have dreamt of calling myself anything other than American ... I had no idea how familiar Maoists were with people from Canada and Sweden. Canada seemed so broad, non-particular, open-minded. (73-74)

She acquires her global identity not just through eco-feminism, but a kind of universalism, which I also call humanitarian identity. The theory of humanitarian identity elaborated earlier in references to my own writing alludes to the modern Indian philosopher Sri Aurobindo’s concept of humanitarian identity as expressed in his *The Ideal of Human Unity*.

Sri Aurobindo writes in the concluding article of *The Ideal of Human Unity*:

A spiritual religion of humanity is the hope of the future. By this is not meant what is ordinarily called a universal religion, a system, a thing of creed and intellectual belief and dogma and outward rite. Mankind has tried unity by that means; it has failed and deserved to fail, because there can be no universal religious system, one in mental creed and vital form. The inner spirit is indeed one, but more than any other the spiritual life insists on freedom and variation in its self-expression and means of development. A religion of humanity means the growing realization that there is a secret Spirit, a divine Reality, in which we are all one, that humanity is its highest present vehicle on earth, that the human race and human being are the means by which it will progressively reveal itself here

.... There must be the realization by the individual that only in the life of his fellow men is his own life complete. (Aurobindo 554)

Sri Aurobindo posits here what in the late eighteenth century was pioneered by the Raja Rammohan Roy — practicing a spirituality that goes beyond religion. It is called “Brahma Dharma” and still exists today in India but is not popular to the extent that it might be. Sri Aurobindo offers a paradigm of spirituality, which dissolves all dogmatism, outward rite, and also a certain kind of intellectual belief. Sri Aurobindo did not believe in intellectuality devoid of spirituality. As he also argued in *The Ideal of Human Unity*, rationality without spirituality can trap one within ego's boundary. However, the kind of spirituality he offers does not confine oneself, but liberates oneself in the global community.

Humanitarian identity is not bound by specific dogmatic, racial, or religious boundaries or constraint, but advocates a religion of humanity. Kincaid's *Among Flowers* points toward a humanitarian identity, in which the world can come together through various paradigms. She achieves it through nature, for which the feminists came up with the term eco-feminism, and the whole book of her journey through the Himalayas corroborates that. How dissatisfied she would be, if she could not connect her garden in Vermont with the flora and fauna in the Himalayas. But her commitment to universality or humanitarian identity is expressed as well in *Among Flowers*. She is friendly towards the Maoists; she is friendly with the Sherpas; she is a friend of the European travelers Dan and Blydden; she is also friendly with the strangers and pedestrians. Except once or twice, when she mentions her mother, she never mentions her roots, or her Caribbean identity. She is absolutely in love with both nature and human beings. Her cosmic and universal observation about a true bond with nature and the humankind establishes this:

Vermont all by itself should be Eden and garden worthy enough. But apparently, I do not find it so. I seem to believe that I will find my idyll more a true ideal, only if I can populate it with plants from another side of the world. (189)

### **Brennan, Kincaid, and Me**

Brennan's theory of “original logic,” which mentions connecting with nature symbolically to retrieve the original phase before birth, is present in Kincaid. Brennan's theory of “transmission of affect” occurs in material terms throughout *Among Flowers*. Kincaid is connecting with the cosmos—she does not differentiate between different identities based on religion, race, or culture. It is all about love and the transmission of affect. Because she has crossed over any limitations related to “foundational fantasy,” she can practice transmitting positive effects to the world. The reflection of another Indian philosopher who believes in more practicality and pluralistic identity is also evident here. In *The Argumentative Indian* and also in *Reason before Identity*, Amartya Sen posits a universal identity, which supports different identities from different racial and ethnic groups; but the determining factor is “reason,” which is

needed to assess which identity to adhere to at the right moment. Does it then undermine one's integrity? I do not think so. His famous example in *Reason before Identity* is the case in which an Italian feminist in Sudan has to choose between two identities based on the need of the situation. The feminist chooses her feminist identity over her Sudanese identity. Thus, Kincaid chooses to be Canadian rather than American, not just to protect herself, but to show her flexibility in choosing an identity based on the need of the situation. However, this could pose a problem from time to time because one needs philosophy as well as reason. One needs spirituality and reason, as proposed by Sen.

### ***Political Sublime***

Practicing the political sublime is another way of suggesting that humanitarian identity is working. The basic concept is to bring the spiritual to the material plane by practicing the theory of transmission of affect or practicing ego-transcendence as explained in my *Jouissance as Ananda: Indian Philosophy, Feminist Theory and Literature*. It is revisiting the Kantian sublime from a non-western perspective.<sup>5</sup>

I want to conclude with this Sanskrit saying: *Bahati Nadi Ramati Sadhu, or the* mendicants travel from place to place as the river flows. Kincaid's book abounds in rivers. The two main rivers are Arun and Barun. The rivers, with their symbolic presence, point toward that universality, the nomadic status of a wise mendicant/traveler who searches meaning of life through a garden in another part of the world. The movement of Kincaid and the journey of the rivers sometimes come close and touch each other by giving each other almost a meditative relief. Globalization starts with movement and a river starts with movement also.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup>For further reference, see Teresa Brennan's book *Globalization and its Terror*, Saskia Sassen's *Globalization and its Discontents*, and Vandana Shiva's *Earth Democracy, Justice, Sustainability and Peace*.

<sup>2</sup>Please note Kant's observation in this regard in *The Critique of Judgment*: "It follows hence that the sublime is not to be sought in the things of nature, but only in our ideas" (109).

<sup>3</sup>I often asked myself this question. The burning question within my mind was why we in the West are so predominantly preoccupied with problem and not with solution. I finally found the answer in Brennan's observation that it is limited only to clinics and literature. People in general have reservations about practicing transmission of affect or inculcating and nourishing the art of healing and feeling good.

<sup>4</sup>The Indian feminist Vandana Shiva calls this intimate feeling "home." She defines it in the following way: "Home is where there is always a place for you at the table and where you can count on sharing what is at the table. To be part of a home, a household, is to have access to life" (*Earth Democracy* 3). Vandana Shiva's grievance arises as a staunch critique of injustices perpetrated on earth in the name of globalization. What she tries to convey is her message on "earth democracy:" everyone has equal access to the earth's resources, because there is justice in the way nature operates its economy. It is also very similar to what Brennan suggests in her theory of "energetics" by valorizing the mother's womb and nature.

<sup>5</sup>I want to emphasize one of Kant's the observations on the sublime here: "We can therefore append to the preceding formulas explaining the sublime this other: the sublime is that, the mere ability to think which, shows a faculty of the mind surpassing every standard of Sense" (*The Critique of Judgment* 110). Kantian Sublime makes a permanent divide between the senses and the sublime. Beautiful is associated with the senses and the sublime with the reason. But in Indian philosophy there is no divide between the senses and the notion of the sublime.

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